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From *Shanghai* to *Iug-2* … and What Now? Traces of (Re-)Claiming Bishkek from Multitemporal Fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

This article examines practices of (re-)claiming in Bishkek through the prism of "multitemporal fieldwork." Focusing on the young male residents of a Soviet-era neighborhood, I trace their ways of performing belonging in a rapidly changing urban environment. Most significantly, these men's coming of age has been accompanied by a gradual detachment from their exclusive focus on a neighborhood community that locally used to be known as Shanghai. Already during our first encounter in 2007, the primary territorial orientation for these residents' social identification and integration had shifted: it then addressed the larger unit of the whole city, where the claim of "being an urbanite" was made by referring to the neighborhood's administrative name, Iug-2. My most recent observations document not only how "married life" further disconnected these young men from the 2013 neighborhood realities, but also that a multitemporal perspective allows to (re-)contextualize various claims on Bishkek diachronically.

Keywords

Kyrgyzstan – Bishkek – youth – urban space – multitemporal fieldwork – identity – ethnography

In recent years, urban change in Bishkek has proceeded in a particularly dynamic fashion. Demographically, the population of Kyrgyzstan's capital has almost doubled within the last two decades (to unofficially more than 1.3 million).

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In 2005 and 2010, Bishkek was the stage of the country's two "revolutions" that expelled Presidents Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev, respectively. Alongside the establishment of a market economy, Bishkek has become a significant waypoint for regional trade, grown a vital service sector, and attracted significant investment into its local real-estate market. On the other hand, the obvious signs of continuing social stratification and urban gentrification cannot be denied (see Hatcher, this issue).[1] As part of these developments various (interest) groups in the city voice and negotiate their claims, which may pertain to the changing perceptions of central public spaces (Kosmarskaya and Sabirova, this issue), to Islamic urban lifestyles (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova, this volume), or to ritual economies of the life cycle (Turdalieva and Provis, this issue).

This article investigates the practice of "(re-)claiming Bishkek" from the angles of urban belonging and youth biographies. To illustrate this, I will draw on observations from a Bishkek neighborhood that officially is called *Iug-2* (South-2) but locally is known as *Shanghai*. I conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork there in 2007–2008, and since then have returned multiple times. Beginning from my first fieldwork in Shanghai, I have been in touch with "Batyr" and other young Kyrgyz men who have resided in this neighborhood since birth. Following their lives through the past decade, the next paragraphs outline some substantive shifts in their ways of identification and social integration.

Prior to 2008, their claims of belonging mostly addressed the territorial level. In an earlier work, I summarized this process as "from Shanghai to Iug-2" in order to point out that, among Batyr and his peers, a strict focus on the Shanghai neighborhood, understood as "a close community," gradually was replaced by their wish to be recognized as "urbans of Bishkek" more generally. This was implied by the use of the neighborhood's (Soviet) administrative name—Iug-2.[2]

During my subsequent re-visits to Shanghai, I could further trace this detachment of Batyr and his neighborhood boys, as well as a decline in expressing

1 Emil Nasritdinov, Elena Gareyeva, and Tatiana Efremenko, "How Small Kitchens Become Even Smaller: Social Life of Soviet Microdistricts in Bishkek," in Dolly Daou, D.J. Huppatz, and Dinh Quoc Phuong (eds), *Unbounded: On the Interior and Interiority* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 129–148.

2 Philipp Schröder, "'Urbanizing' Bishkek: Interrelations of Boundaries, Migration, Group Size, and Opportunity Structure," *Central Asian Survey*, 29, no. 4 (2010): 453–467; Philipp Schröder, "From Shanghai to Iug-2: Integration and Identification among and beyond the Male Youth of a Bishkek Neighborhood" (PhD diss., Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2012).

belonging through territorial claims. As will be discussed in the main section of this contribution, for most of the (former) Shanghaians the trigger for this change can be found in their personal biographies, wherein "an own family" and professional aspirations replaced youthfulness and leisure time.

Beyond ethnography, this contribution discusses methodological and epistemological aspects of engaging in multitemporal fieldwork.[3] Although my research experience on Shanghai and its inhabitants so far covers a period of merely nine years, this seems sufficient to highlight that multitemporal fieldwork's ability to capture the "ongoing lives" of interlocutors serves to reduce the bias of their untimely and static representation in ethnographic accounts.[4]

2007–2008: Re-Claiming the City as Shanghai Urbans

Back in 2007–2008 Batyr and his peers were all about "re-claiming Bishkek." At that time, they were young males, sport enthusiasts, and students; but most of all they were a bunch of "city guys" (*gorodskie patsany*), who had all been raised in the same Bishkek neighborhood that they proudly called Shanghai.

This neighborhood meant everything to them. Batyr and the other Shanghaians had been living shoulder-to-shoulder in the same Soviet-era apartments since the mid-1980s. They had spent time together in its yards from the first moments when their parents allowed them to play outside. Most important, during their days at the local school, Batyr and the others even spilled blood and risked their health for Shanghai.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the battles between enemy neighborhoods—*raion na raion*—in Bishkek were still ongoing. Back then the Shanghaians fought it out especially with Jiloi, the neighborhood just across the street: several times a week and sometimes with more than 200 participants. At that time, such regular collective fights between adjacent neighborhoods were nothing extraordinary. They occurred as well in many other parts of Bishkek and casually were presented as a standard element in a young male's socialization—it was all part of the "school of the streets."

3 Signe Howell and Aud Talle, "Introduction," in Signe Howell and Aud Talle (eds), *Returns to the Field: Multitemporal Research and Contemporary Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1–24

4 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

PHOTO 1 *View from Batyr's ninth-floor apartment in Shanghai/Iug-2*

Although this kind of neighborhood violence had stopped some years prior to my first encounter with Batyr in 2007, still their fights of the past had remained the primary sociocultural aspect in these young men's life-worlds. The experience of fighting for the "honor" of their neighborhood united them as Shanghaians. The stories about these common days as "warriors" and "musketeers" dominated local memory and defined an individual's standing in Shanghai's pecking order. Furthermore, to have been a reliable brother-in-arms was considered as the decisive litmus test for male solidarity and the stability of a friendship bond. On the other hand, more or less involvement in these neighborhood matters also created separations, such as between neighborhood leaders like Batyr and followers, or between "worthy" older neighborhood brothers (*bratan*) and younger ones (*bratishka*).

Eventually, this led me to conceptualize Shanghai as a resource of identification and integration for its inhabitants. While this resource was defined territorially, it also merged aspects of social organization (friendship and hierarchies of gender, age, and ethnicity) with particular cultural performances (local memory, graffiti art, and digital communities). Toward the end of my stay in 2008, Shanghai still was a highly valorized resource for Batyr and his

age-mates, which made me depict the neighborhood as "the combustion point of [their] socio-emotional integration and identification."[5]

Yet at the same time, in a somewhat longer historical perspective, Batyr and his age-mates criticized the gradual decline of neighborhood attachment among many younger Shanghaians. What was generally framed as the *bratishki*'s "lack of respect for neighborhood matters" meant, for example, that they did not hang out as much in the yards anymore and that they had a weak understanding of "who is who" in Shanghai. In the eyes of Batyr and his Shanghai generation, such declining levels of mutual information and "giving time to Shanghai" was intimately related to the end of the inter-neighborhood fighting since the early 2000s. Without an enemy of similar shape, purpose, and organization as Jiloi used to be, it seemed that the key reason for the Shanghaians to act collectively and tightly communicate across age-hierarchies and other delineations was gone.

For the Shanghaians, this again was related to what they regarded as the most significant change in Bishkek's recent history. In their viewpoint, the "masses" of internal migrants that had been relocating from Kyrgyzstan's rural areas to the capital since the early post-Soviet days seriously endangered the urban way of life as they had known it.[6] The Shanghaians disliked the spread of "rural manners" in Bishkek and said that male youths with a rural background would know "no limits" in terms of being loud, rude, and quick to turn to violence. Accordingly, each Shanghaian had his personal story to share about conflictual encounters with such "rurals," be that somewhere in the streets, in a cafe or a disco club.[7]

As part of my research endeavor, I measured this novel challenge for the Shanghaians against their (and the adjacent neighborhoods') previous history. In the recent past, and prior to the arrival of this rural threat (and myself), urban youth in Bishkek had still clashed on the level of different neighborhoods. Now, the line of separation—from the Shanghai perspective—was between Bishkek's "urbans" more generally and the incoming "rurals" from other parts of Kyrgyzstan.

Toward the end of my fieldwork in 2008, I felt that I was in a position to grasp the significance that these recent developments must have had for Batyr and his peers. They saw themselves in a struggle for Bishkek. And it was

5 Schröder, "From Shanghai to Iug-2," 72.

6 Moya Flynn and Natalya Kosmarskaya, "Exploring 'North' and 'South' in Post-Soviet Bishkek: Discourses and Perceptions of Rural-Urban Migration," *Nationalities Papers*, 40, no. 3 (2010): 453–471.

7 Schröder, "'Urbanizing' Bishkek."

through the prism of Shanghai as a long-established city neighborhood, and of the Shanghaians as its residents "since birth," that Batyr and the others aimed to create an authentic claim on Bishkek as a "city belonging to us and other urbans."

Yet at the same time, the Shanghaians seemed to understand that the odds stood against them. Their mood was slightly melancholic as they realized that not only would "the rurals" be too numerous to keep up with in the long run, but also that with the shift from a narrow "Shanghai focus" to a more encompassing "urban understanding," the intricate relatedness to their neighborhood would unavoidably suffer.

For Batyr and his age-mates there was an additional burden in this development. As they all stood on the brink of passaging into adulthood—from student to breadwinner, from bachelor to family man—they were expected to "get off the neighborhood streets," to get "serious" with their lives, and to finally leave their "Shanghai youth days" behind.[8]

Methodological Interlude: From a Lack of Informants to Multitemporal Fieldwork

By 2008 I had already planned to follow the lives of Batyr and his peers beyond my initial fieldwork and its topic. In fact, this interest originated from a circumstance that I originally considered a setback in my fieldwork.

Soon after I became a member of Batyr's circle in Shanghai, my next endeavor was to expand the scope of interlocutors and include some of the neighbors who were older than Batyr and his age-mates by 5–10 years. From these neighbors, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of Shanghai's local history; also, they might provide me with some additional reflections on the younger generations of Shanghaians, such as Batyr.

Yet no matter how determined I was, frequently prompting Batyr and his age-mates to set me up with their older brothers, or at least to provide some other contact outside of their family networks, my attempts were unsuccessful. In hindsight, this failure seems inevitable for multiple reasons. One concerns kinship dynamics. As part of this, it must have been not at all advisable for the likes of Batyr to get me in touch with their elder brothers. After all, none

8 For a more detailed investigation of such transitioning from childhood to adulthood for youth in Tajikistan, see Stephan Manja, "Education, Youth, and Islam: The Growing Popularity of Private Religious Lessons in Dushanbe, Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey*, 29, no. 4 (2010): 469–483.

of them could guarantee them that I would not accidentally reveal the one or other misdemeanor that Batyr and his peers had tried hard to conceal from their (extended) family.

Another reason, to which Batyr confessed only several years later, was jealousy. He said that "we all somehow did not want to lose you to the elder brothers." This expressed the concern that once I was in touch with males closer to my own age—I am seven years older than Batyr—I might have less interest in hanging out with him and his age-mates anymore. At the time of my fieldwork, however, to admit something like this would have gravely contradicted the masculine efforts by which Batyr and his peers aimed to banish such expressive emotionality into the female gender compartment. Thus, this truth obviously had to rest for some years, at least until I had proven over time not to lose interest in Batyr's and his peers' lives.

Such personal reasons aside, there was also a practical obstacle why Batyr could not link me to some of his older neighborhood brothers. This started from the rather clear-cut separations that existed between Shanghai's different "generations" of young males. Within the neighborhood age-hierarchy one generation comprised three years, meaning that anyone who was younger or older than oneself by more than two years either was a *bratishka*, a (fictive) younger neighborhood brother, or a *bratan*, a (fictive) older neighborhood brother.

Furthermore, there was a common understanding that around the age of 22–25, the latest age for marriage and fatherhood, a young man should move away from "being in the yards constantly" and instead focus his time and energy on his professional advancement and on starting his own family. In most cases this "rite of passage" coincided with a geographic relocation. Sooner or later many newlywed couples aimed to move into their own apartment, which often meant leaving Iug-2/Shanghai and settling in another Bishkek neighborhood. In 2007–2008, for Batyr and his generation, this led to the situation that such older neighbors, both physically and socially (i.e., as concerned legitimate reasons to contact them), were "off the streets" and thus out of reach for them. Today I understand that to bridge this gap on my behalf would have been almost impossible for Batyr at that time, regardless of whether or not he had sincere intentions to do so.

For my doctoral thesis, I suggested to the Shanghaians that one of the few available representatives of this group of older neighbors, who was already married and a father, should be named "Bolot." Beyond being a regular Kyrgyz first name, this was intended to express an orientation toward the future, as in Kyrgyz language *bolot* can be translated as "will be." Following this adjustment, I stopped chasing after the Shanghaians older than Batyr and instead deferred

this research interest: some years ahead from 2008, once they should be—*bolot*—"off the streets," how will the lives of Batyr and his age-mates look like?

Methodologically, this got me engaged in multitemporal fieldwork, understood as the "practice of returning to the same group of people on many occasions over a long period of time."[9] In my case, I have re-visited Batyr and the other Shanghaians at least once a year since my original fieldwork. Certainly, this can only be the prelude to a more serious longitudinal analysis, many of which cover several decades.[10] Still, the following ethnographic vignettes, collected during a visit in summer 2013, shall serve as a first illustration of the drifts in Batyr's and his peers' life-worlds during the past few years.

In the concluding remarks, I will also discuss some further implications that such a "personal restudy"[11] may have on ethnographic practice more generally. In my view, this especially concerns the potential to deliver more authentic (re-)presentations of interlocutors by not pinning them to a single static "point in time," but by contextualizing them within "the course of time."

Revisited 2013: A Family Soccer Evening and What Has Become of the Shanghaians?

A Family Soccer Evening

On a Sunday evening in August 2013, I joined Batyr and some other Shanghaians for their weekly neighborhood soccer match. Unlike in the past, when these matches took place on the local school playground, these days the Shanghaians meet at a nearby mini-soccer facility called Futbolistan. There, for 1,000 som per hour, they rent one of the playgrounds to carry out their "Shanghai tournament."

Until the early 2000s, when Batyr and his age-mates still played on a simpler playground inside their neighborhood, they divided the teams up by the different yards of Shanghai ("first yard" vs. "second yard," etc.). Back then, this reflected their opinion that a young male's loyalty should first be with the yard where his (parent's) apartment was located, and second only with *Shanghai* in general. In the eyes of Batyr's generation, the primary reason for this rather narrow territorial focus was that during their youth there had been "always

9 Howell and Talle, "Introduction," vii.

10 Piers Vitebsky, "Repeated Returns and Special Friends: From Mythic Encounter to Shared History," in Signe Howell and Aud Talle (eds), *Returns to the Field: Multitemporal Research and Contemporary Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 180–202.

11 Lowell Holmes, "Über Sinn und Unsinn von *restudies*," in Hans Peter Duerr (ed.), *Authentizität und Betrug in der Ethnologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 225–251.

enough" age-mates around in their own yard to befriend; and so it was not really "necessary" to engage in social relations that extended across the boundaries of Shanghai's different yards, let alone into the other neighborhoods close by.

Nowadays, however, the soccer teams are divided differently. Batyr explains: "Usually we now make three teams, according to age: the youngest ones, the middle ones, and the older ones." In the longer run of the last about 20 years, this practice illustrates a major shift in the neighborhood's social organization: away from a strong focus on the yard as the exclusive origin of valuable friendship ties and toward the perception that a whole age group of Shanghaians may become a meaningful social unit, regardless from which of the neighborhood's yards exactly someone originates.

This was made even clearer to me some days later. While roaming through Shanghai with Batyr, we encounter a group of eight younger neighbors who are standing together on a playground. In response to my question about who of them would be from which yard, they answered to be from different yards. More importantly, they add: "The yards do not matter today anymore. We were born in this neighborhood, that's why we became friends. Because we are few now."

Such statement, besides resonating the changing praxis of social identification and integration inside the neighborhood, invites contemplation about the recent demographic changes that have affected Shanghai. Ever since Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991 the Shanghaians have dwindled in number: first because many of the established neighbors left, going to other areas of Bishkek or even to other countries; and also because the new neighbors coming in did not attach to this area in a similar way, i.e., they understood themselves to be living in Iug-2, "some neighborhood in Bishkek," and not in Shanghai, "a place with a proud history."[12] Back in 2007–2008, this development toward becoming a minority had been a significant concern for Batyr and his age-mates, and they frequently speculated about future violent conflicts for neighborhood supremacy between themselves and the "more and more rurals moving into Shanghai."

In 2013, however, during this soccer evening and on other occasions, such neighborhood issues were not a topic that the Shanghaians would bring up on their own. Six years after my original fieldwork, other items dominated their everyday agendas. "We became serious now," was how the Shanghaians

12 For 2009, the changing group sizes due to in-migration from rural areas indicated that within the Shanghai/Iug-2 neighborhood the group of established "urbans" would still be in a 50–60% majority vis-à-vis the "newcomers/rurals" (35–45%). As concerns the level of the whole city, however, the urbans already were a 35% minority versus 55% majority of rurals or newcomers (Schröder, "'Urbanizing' Bishkek," 458–459). For a more detailed assessment of the different migration "waves" toward Kyrgyzstan's capital since the late Soviet era, see Paul Fryer, Emil Nasritdinov, and Elmira Satybaldieva, "Moving Toward the Brink? Migration in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Central Asian Affairs*, 1, no. 2 (2014): 171–198.

summarized this. It expressed a process in which most of them had to adjust their primary focus away from enjoying their copious leisure time with neighborhood friends, chatting, playing cards, playing sports, and sharing some beers while hanging out on the benches of their yards. These days most Shanghaians of Batyr's generation were married and had children. The others, as Batyr himself, were preparing for marriage, mostly in terms of "trying to find money for the wedding [ceremony and potentially the bride-price]." In both cases, this demanded proof of being a capable breadwinner. Accordingly, the 2013 issues among the Shanghaians were no longer youth violence and dating girls; instead, they conversed about their various jobs, about which cars they had bought or considered buying, and generally about the difficulties of providing for a wife and family in times of "our country's permanent economic crisis."

This marked a shift away from the typical "neighborhood talk" of the past, which mostly drew from the spare news happening within this confined territory and thus was ripe with repetitions and "the same old stories." But since these days as students or early professionals back in 2007–2008, the careers of Batyr and his peers have evolved in quite different spheres. Therefore, in stark contrast to the past, during today's gatherings the Shanghaians do not confine themselves to sharing warm narratives of their common youth, but mix in "grown-up topics" and new insights from their job environments. This does not only prove to be a more entertaining conversation for everyone, but also seems to give the Shanghaians a sense of being more intimately connected to the world beyond their neighborhood.[13]

In terms of employment, Batyr's close fried Metis proves to be most constant, as he still works at Bishkek's Manas airport with a cargo company importing goods from Dubai. Semetei, who was Batyr's favorite *bratishka* back then, had worked for a Bishkek construction company as a site supervisor, but he recently got involved in the "mushroom business" with a local company that imports and exports between Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Other Shanghaians, for example, work for Finca, a micro-finance organization, or aim to establish an export channel of Kyrgyz-made felt products to Japan and Europe. The "most international Shanghaian" so far turned out to be Kanat, who since 2008 has been working as a tour guide for different Russian-speaking tourism agencies in places such as Turkey, Egypt, and Malaysia.

13 For a more detailed examination of how such global connectedness of Kyrgyz youth might be regionally layered and "nested," see Stefan Kirmse, "Nested Globalization in Osh, Kyrgyzstan: Urban Youth Culture in a 'Southern' City," in Tsypylma Darieva, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Melanie Krebs (eds), *Urban Spaces after Socialism: Ethnographies of Public Places in Eurasian Cities* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011), 283–305.

Such passaging from neighborhood youngster to more serious family men was also evident during this soccer evening. The situation was significantly different than in the past, when the later evenings in the yards of Shanghai were "males only" and—as part of the neighborhood talk—were marked by swearwords, bragging, and adventurous stories of youth violence or sexual conquests.

Now some Shanghaians brought their wives and kids along to Futbolistan, who were sitting on the benches next to the playground. The wives, barely observing the game, seemed to know each other well and mostly chatted on child-rearing issues. There were baby strollers, homemade sandwiches, and soft drinks. There were harmless jokes about the Shanghaians' "silly youth days," which in the presence of wives and children mostly aimed at pushing these escapades into a distant, unreflexive past, thereby converting them into harmless episodes. In short, it was a family atmosphere. And during his breaks between the matches Batyr, who used to be known as a fierce fighter (nicknamed "psycho") and as a strict neighborhood leader back in the days, obviously enjoyed taking the child of his fellow Shanghaian for a walk around the playground (see Photo 2).

PHOTO 2 *Batyr takes his fellow Shanghaian's child for a walk as the soccer game continues*

Also, I noticed a quite easygoing attitude toward age hierarchy. "Respect," some years prior, had been a superior element in neighborhood youth relations. Partially, this was about the older neighbors (violently) enforcing their juniors' obedience and sometimes even extracting money from them.

During this soccer evening, one could argue that the separation in teams according to age—the youngest, the middle ones, and the oldest—reflected the continued importance of age hierarchy. Furthermore, there were obvious signs of "showing respect," for instance in how the younger Shanghaians addressed and spoke to the older ones. This composition of teams, however, could also be read differently. For this, one needs to know that the youngsters' team evidently contained the better soccer players. In fact, some of them were "mini-soccer" professionals, who were under contract with local teams, practiced four or five times per week, and participated in regional tournaments. In contrast to this, their *bratany* of Batyr's age clearly were in worse shape and less skilled.

It was no surprise, then, that with their particular tournament mode, "We play for five minutes or until one team is up by two goals," Batyr's team "as usual" ended up losing. Aside from pride, money was also at stake. "To make it more interesting," said one Shanghaian, "our rules are that the losing team in the end covers the whole rent for the playground." On this evening, this amounted to a total 2,500 som (about €33) for 2.5 hours of playing, meaning 400 som for each of Batyr's team members.

No one on the playground would have expected that "out of respect" the better and younger players would go as far as to let their older neighborhood brothers win. Still, with perhaps a stricter age hierarchy in place, one might speculate that the older Shanghaians at least could have aimed for mixed teams to increase their chances.

Yet the Shanghaians made it clear on this evening that neither winning nor money would be the primary purpose of their meeting. "Most important," said an older Shanghaian called Nurlan, "we are happy that the neighborhood is still coming together like this. Especially that the younger ones keep this up, we value it." This suggests that "showing respect" in this particular instance meant that the younger ones make their way to the playground for the sake of Shanghai, despite the fact that they are already overwhelmed with their own training sessions and that for them the matches must be rather unchallenging.

Beyond the Neighborhood: Batyr became Bolot

Since my original fieldwork in 2007–2008, the Shanghaians of Batyr's age have expanded their focus beyond their neighborhood. In 2013, this was not only noticeable because they integrated their families or their evolving professional

experiences into their mutual life-worlds, but also because they no longer embraced the themes that in the past had been highly important to them.

One such theme was the urban versus rural divide. In the past, for the Shanghaians this distinction was the key identification to reclaim a Bishkek environment, which they perceived to be changing for the worse due to the many new migrants from more remote areas of Kyrgyzstan. Yet during my visit in 2013, even Batyr was not up-to-date on the current state of this debate. When I first asked him whether this whole "thing of urbans against rurals" was still ongoing, he first remained silent and avoided an answer. Obviously, he had doubts about the accuracy of his personal assessment because instead of voicing hiw own opinion he simply told a younger neighborhood brother, who was standing next to us in the yard, to reply to my question.[14]

This continuation of previous patterns—as Bolot's generation in the past, now the one of Batyr had left the streets (literally and metaphorically)—was further illustrated by a burnt-out construction trailer (see Photo 3). I had spotted this trailer on a parking lot next to one of Shanghai's apartment blocks on my way to meet with Batyr. Talking to him, it turned out that some months before there had been plans by "some investors" to remove the parking lot and instead erect a new apartment building on this land. "An *elitka*," said Batyr, meaning an upscale building with exclusive apartments that only Bishkek's richer residents, but certainly not the Shanghaians, could afford. "But apparently," he continues, "the local people did not want it here, and so this happened. ... Now everything is stopped and the court has to decide."

Beyond this being a fascinating case study of urban social(ist) protest against Bishkek's ever more exclusive real-estate sector, my surprise rather originated from the fact that Batyr was completely clueless as to who exactly had committed this arson. Five years earlier, it would have been unimaginable that something of this magnitude would happen in "his neighborhood" without Batyr's knowledge. Back then, in his capacity as a leader of Shanghai, Batyr was at the center of the local flow of information. Yet now, aside from sharing with me the general rumors that the inhabitants of the building adjacent to the parking lot may have been behind this, Batyr could not provide any further insight. As the other members of his Shanghai generation, these days Batyr was

14 This younger neighborhood brother then responded that "certainly" rural migrants would still move into the city, including their Shanghai neighborhood. But also, that the larger-scale urban–rural divide would not be a similarly pressing matter anymore "as 3–4 years ago" because now there had emerged a certain "petty tribalism," as part of which rurals from different regions of the country would be opposed to one another within the urban domain of Bishkek.

PHOTO 3 *Burnt-out construction trailer in Iug-2/Shanghai*

noticeably removed from the everyday neighborhood proceedings, and his ear was not close to the street anymore.

Therefore, in 2013 Batyr's relation to the younger Shanghaians quite closely resembled the one that Bolot had maintained with Batyr and his age-mates back in 2007–2008: a "disconnection" that was characterized not by intimate

and frequent exchanges, but by encounters that were mostly "accidental, sporadic, short, and superficial."[15] In this way, Batyr, representative for his generation of Shanghaians, in fact had become Bolot.

Conclusion: (Re-)Claiming, Processual Ethnography, and Moving On

In the ethnographic part of this contribution, I attempted to cover some aspects in the life-worlds of Batyr and other young male inhabitants of Shanghai from the early 2000s through 2013. For this, I contrasted aspects of local memory referring to a time before my arrival in Bishkek with data from my 2007–2008 fieldwork in this neighborhood, before then adding some observations from a visit in 2013.[16]

In terms of "claiming" practices, in my case this followed the construction of "own belonging" to distinct territorial units within the city of Bishkek (and simultaneously the denial of such belonging to others). Looked at over the course of time, this revealed a gradual shift. First, in a pre-2007 period, claiming focused on belonging to Shanghai as well as to a particular yard within it. This occurred in opposition to other such Bishkek neighborhoods. Following that, during my long-term fieldwork in Shanghai in 2007–2008, I witnessed that such claiming now addressed a larger territorial level, i.e., one on which Bishkek's "urbans," which along with the Shanghaians included the long-term inhabitants of other neighborhoods, were opposed to the growing group of post-Soviet rural migrants to the city. For the sake of being "an urban," this change entailed a fading identification with Shanghai and the own yard within it. Finally, as documented in the observations from 2013, this process of disconnection had proceeded further for the generation of Batyr and his age-mates.

Alongside their transition into adulthood and the newfound focus on the professional and family domains, they had exited from the more public "street life" and their intensive neighborhood absorption. In contrast to their previously vigorous practices of claiming, which merged performances of pride for Shanghai and Bishkek with the use of violence to defend the own neighborhood's borders and honor, or "to put the rurals of Bishkek back in their place,"

15 Schröder, "From Shanghai to Iug-2," 118.

16 For a wider historical perspective on youth culture in different neighborhoods of Kyrgyzstan's capital since the Soviet era, see Emil Nasritdinov and Philipp Schröder, "From Frunze to Bishkek: Soviet Territorial Youth Formations and Their Decline in the 1990s and 2000s," *Central Asian Affairs*, 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–28.

in 2013 there was mostly silence. Batyr and his peers were not at all engaged in re-claiming *Shanghai* or Bishkek. They were indifferent toward whichever current trends of socio-territorial integration or separation existed among Bishkek's youth, such as the question of whether after the "urban vs. rural divide" there might now have emerged a line of conflict along regional origins ("those from Talas vs. those from Osh"). Even the current trials and tribulations within their most immediate living environment, the burnt-out trailer and their neighbors' desperate struggle against urban gentrification, had no impact on Batyr and his Shanghaian friends.

As far as methodology is concerned, the ethnographic insights presented here draw from multiple revisits to Shanghai since my original fieldwork in 2007–2008. In between these visits, I could keep in touch with Batyr and my other interlocutors via various social media platforms and the internet. Such practice of multitemporal fieldwork, as Howell and Talle argue, "gives rise to a more processual understanding—a description *through* time—in which one is enabled to witness the many events that provoke change or resistance to change."[17]

Beyond the time dimension, Lowell D. Holmes[18] has pointed out that due to the continuity in personnel, both the researcher and the interlocutors, a "personal restudy" would be a reliable basis especially for assessing "the dynamic factors of a culture." To make this point more clear, one can also draw on Johannes Fabian, who in "Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object"[19] argued that the use of an "ethnographic present"—e.g., the claim that the Kyrgyz *are* patrilineal—would place interlocutors outside the flow of history, thereby freezing them in a distanced past.[20] Multitemporal fieldwork, in fact, could be regarded as a way to lessen this particular bias of undue representation, as the sequencing of multiple such ethnographic presences, which portray the same set of interlocutors at different junctures of history, enable a more continuous contextualization of their lives. In this way, because multitemporal fieldwork creates additional opportunities for what Fabian has termed "intersubjective time," i.e., shared dialogue and communication

17 Howell and Talle, "Introduction," 12.

18 Holmes, "Über Sinn und Unsinn von *restudies*," 236.

19 Johannes Fabian, "Cultural Anthropology and the Question of Knowledge," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18, no. 2 (2012): 439–453.

20 In contrast to that a sentence such as "the Kyrgyz were patrilineal" (at the time of observation) would not be a similarly categorical statement thus raising the issue of historical validity. See also Kevin Birth, "The Creation of Coevalness and the Danger of Homochronism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14, no. 3 (2008): 4.

in fieldwork, researchers can better pay tribute to their interlocutors' ongoing lives and thus their historical agency.[21]

Furthermore, multitemporal fieldwork enables researchers to produce layered descriptions, where epistemological and methodological reflections may link and explicate ethnographic descriptions that date from earlier or later fieldwork. In this article, I have tested this approach by re-investigating an earlier research assumption about the evolution from "Shanghai boys" to family men and life "off the streets." Because the group of "older neighborhood brothers" was inaccessible to me in 2007–2008, later on I returned to ard my original informants who have been going through their own transition between then and 2013.

As expected, the fact that I lack an equally strong empirical base on those neighborhood generations preceding Batyr's prevents an elaborate comparison of the commonalities and differences between these transitions that occurred at various points in Bishkek's urban trajectory. Still, learning now from Batyr what back then I could not learn from Bolot adds another snapshot to a processual view on this neighborhood's local history. Before 2008, I understood the neighborhood to be developing "from Shanghai to Iug-2," which for Batyr and his peers was a challenging shift away from a close-knit, localized community toward being "just a neighborhood in Bishkek with some remaining urban inhabitants." Five years later, Batyr and the other Shanghaians apparently have moved on, which puts their nostalgic grief over "losing our neighborhood" from some years before into a less dramatic light (both for them and for myself). The fact that in the meantime I have accumulated more knowledge about their ongoing lives, in particular how the alternative domains of family and career have evolved for them, has also contributed to making my interpretation diachronic.[22]

Still, detachment from their neighborhood youth days does not necessarily equal cutting the social cord for Batyr and his peers, which is why they especially cherished those rare Shanghai moments such as their regular soccer tournament.

21 Fabian, "Cultural Anthropology and the Question of Knowledge," 446.

22 Signe Howell, "Cumulative Understandings: Experiences from the Study of Two Southeast Asian Societies," in Signe Howell and Aud Talle (eds), *Returns to the Field: Multitemporal Research and Contemporary Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2012), 155.